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ABSTRACT

Noting that growing consensus about the importance of the first 5 years of life has prompted in-depth considerations about the systemic quality of early care and education in the United States, this issue of "State Education Leader" examines various aspects of early learning. Topics considered in this issue are: (1) key issues in financing early care and education; (2) leadership in early care and education; (3) educational technology in early care and education; (4) creating an integral system of governance of early care and education; (5) teaching quality; (6) the movement toward a seamless "P-16" educational system from preschool to postsecondary education in Illinois; (7) determining school readiness; and (8) the Early Learning Initiative of the Education Commission of the States. (KB)

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S. F. Walker
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

by Kristie Kauerz

Early care and education — "early learning" — increasingly is becoming a prominent education policy issue. More women of all income levels are entering the workforce, causing an increased demand for reliable, safe places for their children to stay while they work. Simultaneously, the long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood services are becoming clearer as study after study shows the education and economic pay-offs of investing in young children. Finally, the states — and, indeed, the nation — are making school readiness and academic achievement top priorities.

When the National Education Goals were adopted in 1990, they represented a vision of all children entering school ready to learn and leaving school ready to succeed. In the intervening years, the nation has devoted considerably more attention and resources to the latter than to the former. A 1998 national survey of kindergarten teachers found that barely half their students make the transition to formal schooling without significant difficulties. Clearly, there is a long way to go before the first of the National Education Goals — that all children will start school ready to learn — is achieved.

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Multiple effects

Outside of education policy, early learning issues affect a large number of children and families across the nation. According to the Forum on Child and Family Statistics, in 1999, 54% of children from birth through 3rd grade received care from someone other than parents on a regular basis. This translates to close to 20 million children and represents an increase over 1995, when 51% of children birth through 3rd grade were in nonparental care settings.

"Nonparental care" and other terms like it (early learning, child care, early care and education, preschool, etc.), is used to denote the full range of services used by families to educate and nurture their children when the parent(s) cannot be at home with the child full time. The scope of services addressed by the following articles includes child care centers; preschools; prekindergarten and Head Start programs; nursery schools; school-age child care; family child care homes; and informal child care provided by family, friends and neighbors.

Care and education cannot — and should not — be considered as separate issues when considering young children. Quality care requires attention to cognitive stimulation, enriched language environments and attention to the health, emotional and social development of children. At the same time, early education requires that young children have warm, emotionally engaged relationships with adults and safe physical environments.

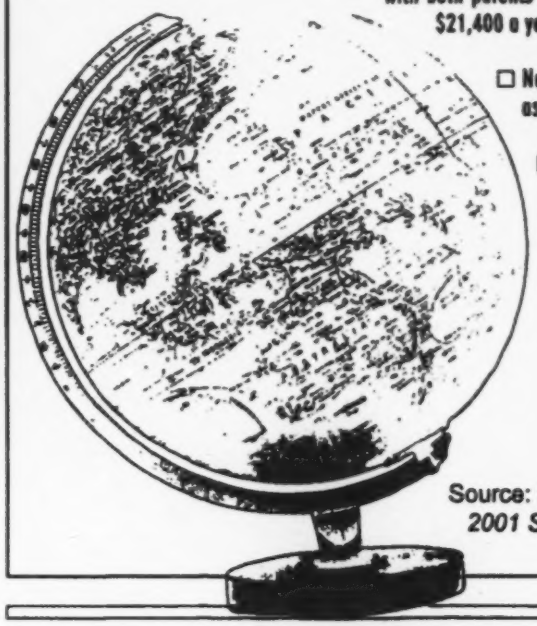
Policymakers, parents and concerned citizens need to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn and grow, and succeed in school and life. To address the inherent policy issues in making this happen, this edition of the *State Education Leader* examines various aspects of early learning. The growing consensus about the importance of the first five years of life has prompted in-depth considerations about the systemic qualities of early care and education in the United States. How should it be financed? How can quality teaching be ensured? How can programs be held accountable for providing good learning and care for young children?

These questions and others are explored on the following pages. For more information about ECS' early learning initiative, contact Kristie Kauerz, 303-299-3662 or kkauerz@ecs.org.

Kauerz is ECS project manager, Early Learning.□

Facts and Figures

- Full-day child care easily costs $4,000 to $10,000 per year — at least as much as college tuition at a public university. Yet, more than one out of four families with young children earns less than $25,000 a year, and a family with both parents working full time at the minimum wage earns only $21,400 a year.
- Nationally, only 12% of children eligible for child care assistance receive help.
- The average salary of a child care worker is only $15,430 a year, less than yearly salaries of funeral attendants, bellhops and garbage collectors.
- Studies of high-quality early childhood programs that continue to support children and their parents into elementary school find that children who participated had a greater chance of completing high school, were less likely to be charged in juvenile court and were less likely to repeat a grade.



Source: Children's Defense Fund, *2001 State of America's Children.*

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FINANCING EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION: KEY ISSUES

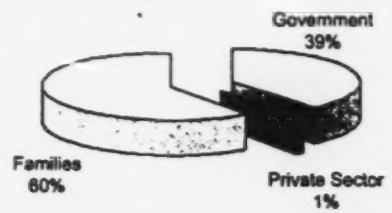
by Louise Stoney

Child care is expensive. In nearly every state in the nation the price of enrolling a 4-year-old in full-time preschool is higher than the price of public college tuition (see box on page 4). While limited public subsidy is available to help some families pay for child care, by and large families simply "make do" with what they can find and afford. Some families are able to afford high-quality care, and some are eligible for government-funded prekindergarten or Head Start programs. But many children receive child care that is mediocre and sometimes dangerous.

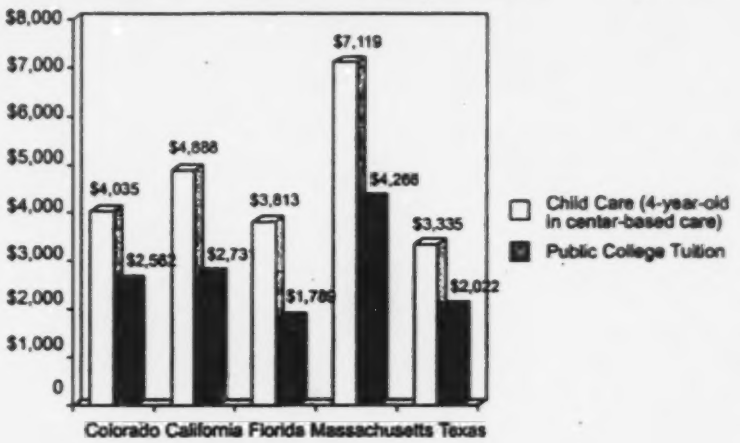
The United States never has developed a clear, cohesive vision for early care and education services. As a result, public support has been piecemeal and almost haphazard. Federal and state funds, for example, have been made available to help low-income families pay for child care, particularly when they move from welfare to work. Many states have funded prekindergarten initiatives, largely for 4-year-old children. But because funding is limited, these much-needed programs often are available only a few hours a day on a school calendar — making it difficult for employed families to take advantage of them.

The federal Head Start program is another important child care funding stream, but these funds generally are insufficient to support full-day, full-year services and are limited to families with incomes at or below the poverty level — again excluding many working families. In some communities, employers, the United Way or local foundations are involved. But overall, private-sector funding is a very small piece of the pie. In short, elements of a system are in place, but the pieces are not designed to fit together in a clear and cohesive way. As a result, millions of children fail to receive the early learning opportunities they need to succeed in school and life.

Revenue Sources for Early Care and Education (1995)



Price of Child Care vs. College Tuition



Financing strategies

It is possible to establish comprehensive early care and education systems that maximize all available resources and meet the needs of both children and families. These systems, however, will require additional sources of funds, as well as new and varied approaches to finance. Strategies will vary based on the economic and political forces in a particular state or community. When exploring financing strategies, the following key principles should be considered:

Assume layered funding — It is highly unlikely that a single funding source will be able to support a full-day, year-round early care and education system. It will be necessary to blend funds from multiple sources, such as federal Child Care and Development Funds, Head Start, state and federal education dollars, and parent fees.

Ideally, this means establishing common funding standards and monitoring practices, coordinated requests for proposals and reporting requirements. It also means assuming that a program will have a single budget to which multiple funders will contribute, rather than making the program create separate budgets, with separate auditing and accountability processes for various funders. States with budgets that assume layered funding include Connecticut, New Jersey and Vermont.

Combine portable and direct financing approaches — Most states administer child care funds as portable subsidies, that is, the

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> "[T]here is not one best way to finance child care. Financing options are as diverse as the system itself."

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subsidy is tied to a specific child and follows him or her to whatever program the family selects. Prekindergarten and Head Start funds, however, typically are administered as direct, institutional subsidies.

The higher education system offers a potential model for how portable and direct subsidies may be combined. In higher education, government provides direct, institutional subsidies to ensure an affordable, high-quality system of education is available to all families, regardless of income. In addition, government makes portable subsidies available to low-income families (grants and scholarships), as well as to families at higher incomes (subsidized loans and savings plans, tax credits, etc.).

The Wisconsin Quality Improvement Grants program and the Connecticut School Readiness Initiative are examples of two different ways to combine portable and direct subsidies for early care and education.

Frame support for child care as an investment in young minds and in the economic development of communities — Child care subsidies are not another form of welfare. Research in several states and cities has shown that public support for child care creates direct and indirect economic benefits. For example, a return-on-investment study in San Antonio, Texas, revealed that for every $1 spent on child care subsidies the city will realize $1.46 in additional tax revenue. In some states, early care and education is a major employer and child care a growing industry that not only helps families work but also creates new jobs.

Develop financing strategies that improve early care and education for all families, not just poor families — Limiting assistance to poor families, fails to acknowledge that all children need opportunities to learn when their brains are growing. The Georgia prekindergarten program and Hawaii's A+ after-school program are two examples of universal child care initiatives. Both of these efforts have received strong public support.

Think outside the box — There are many different ways to finance early care and education. The possibilities are endless:

- ☐ Arkansas just enacted a new surcharge on beer, to be earmarked for child care.
- ☐ Maine, Kansas and Kentucky have earmarked tobacco settlement funds.

Federal & State Expenditures for Child Care (in billions)

Child Care and Development Fund (federal and state funds)	$5.5
TANF Funds spent on child care (transfers and direct expenditures)	$4.4
Head Start	$6.2
State Preschool	$1.98
Dependent Care Tax Credit (foregone federal revenues)	$2.5

Source: A.W. Mitchell (2000, April). *Education for All Young Children: The Role of States and the Federal Government in Promoting Prekindergarten & Kindergarten.* Foundation for Child Development.

- ☐ Georgia created a lottery and set aside a portion of the proceeds for prekindergarten.
- ☐ Missouri earmarked a portion of the Gaming Commission Fund.
- ☐ Colorado has an innovative child care contributions tax credit, as well as a voluntary income tax check-off to raise money for child care quality.
- ☐ Oregon is considering a new tax credit to spur business investment in child care.
- ☐ Rhode Island taps into health care funds to help pay the cost of health insurance for child care providers.
- ☐ Connecticut makes tax-exempt bonds available to help finance facilities, and then uses funds from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to underwrite a portion of the debt.
- ☐ New York, Washington, Boston and other local governments have used criminal justice funds to help create child care centers in court buildings.
- ☐ Local 1199, the National Health and Human Services Employees Union, raises nearly $9 million each year for child care subsidies through collective bargaining agreements with employers in New York.
- ☐ Indiana's Dekko Foundation is building child care endowment funds in six counties.

In short, there is not one best way to finance child care. Financing options are as diverse as the system itself.

Stoney runs the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance.☐

FACING JANUS:

LEADERSHIP IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

by Sharon L. Kagan

In Roman mythology, the two faces of Janus looked in different directions, guarding the gates and purveying entrances and exits to the temple. Like Janus, early care and education sits on the cusp of a swinging gate, with cascades of new opportunities opening before it. And, also like Janus, the nation and the field need to be wise enough to look in multiple directions — from the outside in and the inside out — to create the kind of leadership that will capitalize on the opportunities at hand.

Looking for leadership: from outside in

Advancing leadership in early care and education means looking beyond the current players in the field; it means bringing fresh voices and fresh ideas — from the outside in — to the table. To accomplish this, throughout the nation community-based partnerships are forming to provide support for young children and their families. Such partnerships recognize that new constituencies must be present if reform is to take hold and achieve this by routinely including members from the faith communities, media, corporate and philanthropic sectors. Typically, these entities engage in state-level and/or community planning, the establishment of benchmarks, generating data, public information and will, and in quality enhancement efforts (e.g., accreditation facilitation projects, training and technical support).

Another form of "outside-in" leadership occurs when organizations, not typically associated with early care and education, begin to work on the issue. Such organizations, particularly when they have visibility and neutrality in the community, can be powerful advocates for change. Examples of organizations taking a leadership role include the United Way, Chambers of Commerce, Work-Life Development Organizations, and private business and industry.

"Outside-in" leadership takes other forms as well. Sometimes, individuals not previously

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> "Like Janus, early care and education sits on the cusp of a swinging gate, with cascades of new opportunities opening before it."

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engaged in early care and education become so convinced of its importance that they devote their lives to work in this area. Notable examples include retired bank presidents, editors of major newspapers and presidents of Fortune 500 companies. As role models, these "converts" to early education often become the loudest and most-listened-to voices in the field. Sometimes, these individuals may be elected officials or those close to them; indeed, many state advances in early care and education can be attributed directly to the leadership provided by a governor and/or governor's spouse.

Looking for leadership: from inside out

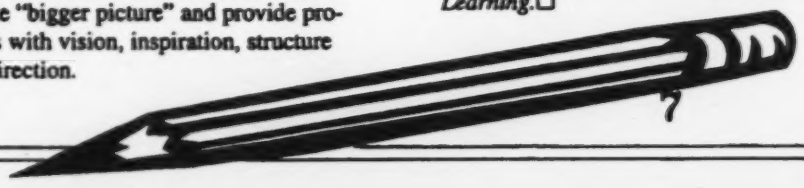
> "Irrefutably, there is a need for strong, vibrant leadership, both within and outside of early childhood education."

As necessary as "outside-in" leaders are, their work will be successful only to the extent that it is complemented by "inside-out" leadership. An "inside-out" leader is one who knows early care and education well. Such leaders may be difficult to discern at first because they do not always resemble the more traditional model of the powerful CEO; they often are discerned more by their qualities, capacities and actions than by their titles or institutional affiliations. Five types of "inside-out" leadership exist in early care and education, each with its own qualities and functions: (1) pedagogical, (2) administrative, (3) advocacy, (4) community and (5) conceptual leadership.

- **Pedagogical leadership** uses knowledge and information provided by researchers, academicians and first-hand experience to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Pedagogical leaders are interpreters of research and disseminators of new information — to other teachers, as well as to parents and the public. They shape education agendas as they reflect upon, redefine and reinterpret realities of the field.
- **Administrative leadership** goes beyond conventional management functions. Early care and education programs are businesses providing services to children, families and communities, and their administrators have the immense task of dealing with budgets, personnel, facilities, staff development, community and family outreach, and planning and accountability. Administrative leaders see the "bigger picture" and provide programs with vision, inspiration, structure and direction.
- **Advocacy leadership** requires a strategic vision of how the field can be advanced using public policy and legislative initiatives. Advocacy leaders possess knowledge of the legislative process and the skills to navigate it. They understand the needs of diverse constituents — children, families, practitioners, employers, communities and media. They understand the process of incremental change and have the patience and persistence to communicate the issues, mobilize varied constituencies, seize opportunities, take risks, think creatively, compromise, collaborate and inspire.
- **Community leadership** has both a vision for quality early care and education, and an understanding of local realities and resources. A community leader is an early childhood educator who goes into the community to educate, inform and construct links among families, available services and resources, and the public and private sectors. These leaders reach out to members of the community who are not involved in early care and education and convey its importance in promoting the health and welfare of children and families.
- **Conceptual leadership** requires a vision of early care and education that transcends any single organization, program, funding stream, service or policy strategy. A conceptual leader considers early care and education reform within broader societal trends, linking it to other reform movements and fields. With a broad view of early care and education, a conceptual leader looks at how one thinks about the destiny of the field and its role in society. Seeking to improve the social good, conceptual leaders push what is, to what might be.

Irrefutably, there is a need for strong, vibrant leadership, both within and outside of early childhood education. Like Janus at the precipice, early care and education stands precariously vulnerable to advancement unless its leadership capacity is both recognized and advanced.

Kagan is a distinguished professor at Teachers College, Columbia University and is ECS' Distinguished Senior Fellow for Early Learning.



YOUNG CHILDREN BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

by Pat Alexander

Want to learn how to program a VCR? Ask a 3-year-old. Having trouble installing that software on your desktop computer? Put a phone book on your chair and hoist a 4-year-old so she can reach the keyboard and CD-ROM drive.

While corporations and school districts are spending millions of dollars on training adults to speak the language of computers, young children are growing up naturally with that language. Unfortunately, adults are trying to keep pace with children who have the advantage of learning this at a very young age.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children has established guidelines for using technology in the classroom. Numerous child care centers and elementary classrooms employ these guidelines as they introduce and use technology in their curriculum. Angela Dorrell, director of education for La Petite Academy, says the company's center directors believe that technology for young children should provide them with active learning opportunities to extend their abilities. "We carefully review software and look for ways to integrate (it) into the children's daily learning experiences."

"Too young"?

Whether or not young children are "too young" for computers and other electronic technologies is a frequently debated issue. Recent reports indicate technology has a positive impact on learning. Cognitive Concepts' software program Earobics has been cited in two recent studies as contributing to young children's improved performance. While the children enjoy the games, the teacher can monitor the child's progress through the software's automatic performance tracking. A Chicago Public Schools' Fall 2000 pilot program showed dramatic, statistically significant gains in 4- and 5-year-old children's phonemic awareness. The Newport News Public Schools just completed a pilot program with kindergarten students that showed statistically significant improvements over a control group who received instruction without Earobics.

The Internet also is coming into play for young children. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge's CyberStart is the nation's first attempt to connect a state's child care centers to the Internet. The first phase provides free computers and Internet education materials to 121 child care centers in 32 Pennsylvania counties. "Children who understand computers and the Internet are more likely to succeed in the new technology-based economy of the 21st century," said Ridge. "With CyberStart, we get computers into our day care centers, and we equip them with state-of-the-art, Internet-based, age-appropriate educational content to help our children learn, interact and have fun."

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Antisocial?

But what about the social experiences that young children require? According to a recent study from Bank Street College, computer use is a social experience in some settings. In the college's study of the IBM KidSmart Early Learning Program, researchers found that most of the time, the majority of children help one another. A strong correlation exists between taking turns and shared satisfaction.

In October 1998, IBM, collaborating with United Way organizations, launched the KidSmart program in five schools in North Carolina. Currently, more than 500,000 pre-kindergarten children participate in the program in more than 800 not-for-profit child care centers and preschools in nearly 200 cities in 45 states across the United States. IBM is expanding the program internationally into more than 30 countries. According to Paula Baker, IBM corporate community relations director, the KidSmart program is a comprehensive effort to give preschool children a jumpstart on learning. Its centerpiece is the Young Explorer, a personal computer designed specifically for young children, encased in Little Tikes furniture and loaded with award-winning education software from Edmark.

"KidSmart focuses on the best assets of IBM: technology and expertise. We view this as an education tool – a way to use technology to help children learn while they are having fun." The initiative places an emphasis on economically disadvantaged preschoolers or others who do not have access to technology.

The KidSmart program also helps teachers become comfortable with computers. *A Multimedia Guide to Computers and Early Learning* is available online at www.ibm.com/ibm/ibmgives. The guide helps teachers answer questions regarding equitable access to computers and the use of computers to support classroom learning.

Technology is influencing early learning in other ways. Training and certification programs for teachers and child care professionals also have gone high-tech. Michael Betz, president of Professional Training Consulting Inc. (PTC), a nationwide training firm, says more than 75,000 students across the country are accessing training from PTC online (www.ptctraining.com). PTC's Web site delivers "e-learning" modules with information that trainees need to meet state regulations. For example, as part of a module on infectious diseases, child care professionals learn the proper way to wash their hands, complete with animation and sound.

Betz sees e-learning as the way the regulatory industry should think about training. Advantages include less time away from the job, availability 24 hours a day/seven days a week, and a design that won't let trainees advance until they demonstrate competency of each module, he notes.

Bridging the digital divide will take its shape in many forms. Linking students' and teachers' comfort level in using technology, linking effective use of technology in classroom activities and teacher planning, and linking use of computers at home, child care centers and schools are all bridges being built.

Alexander is a free-lance consultant in the field of educational technology and a member of Governor Jeanne Shaheen's Early Learning Advisory Council.□

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ELIMINATING
THE "NONSYSTEM" OF GOVERNANCE

by Jane Wiechel

Governance might seem to be the province of bureaucrats and policy mavens, far removed from the day-to-day realities of most Americans — especially parents of young children. But, in fact, parents and caregivers across the nation are dramatically affected by the way in which early care and education is funded, organized and governed. Effective governance is critical to assuring equitable access to consistently high-quality programs.

Across the nation today, early care and education is a "nonsystem" — an accumulation of insufficient, ineffective and uncoordinated mechanisms for funding and governance. Programs have proliferated on a govern-as-you-go basis. The time is ripe for a coordinated system of early care and education that creates a continuity of services for young children and their families. If a quality early care and education system is to be achieved, there must be coordinated, rational governance processes at the national, state and local levels.

Higher, wider, deeper

For the creation of a governance structure, two challenges must be met: transcendence of selfish interests in the higher pursuit of a more integrated system; and fair consideration of all voices and values across a wide array of interests and issues. As we explore new approaches, we need to see the landscape from a point of view that includes and transcends a multitude of dichotomies: private vs. public, government role vs. parental responsibility, care vs. education, and readiness vs. results. "Higher, wider, and deeper" are the touchstones to be considered in redesigning the governance of early care and education in the United States.

What might a wider governance approach to early care and education entail? Clearly, we must create better ways of bringing together the five essential partners in the enterprise — family, community, employers, government and the profession. The field of questions regarding

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these relationships is broad. How can we design and implement an early care and education system that is responsive to family economic necessities and changing workforce dynamics, yet also strives to preserve family stability and personal responsibility? What is the shared responsibility of community, government and business to support the recruitment, education and retention of highly trained and well-qualified early care and education professionals?

Who will the providers be, and what standards should be adhered to, to ensure quality? How will we design, and where will we build places and spaces for the care and education of young children? Who pays, how much and for what? Public support and political will emerges from integral partnerships involving family, community, employers, government and the profession. Deliberative processes that confront and integrate various expectations and needs are needed.

What might a deeper approach to governance involve? The "best practices" movement in business is making its way into the early care and education industry. It is imperative that we build a governance system that looks at human creativity and organization as a positive force and supports reciprocal relationships through dialogue, inquiry and action. A "best practices" framework for early childhood education is needed to bring people together to talk about, study, and enact better ways to live and work in a democracy.

Human systems change in relationship to the quality of questions that are asked. For many years, questions of access for children who are disadvantaged dominated conversations about early care and education; as a result, programs for children living in poverty expanded as a common priority. In recent times, the focus has shifted to questions of quality, affordability and accountability, and now programs are facing a different kind of scrutiny. The new millennium holds the potential to create an integral system of governance of early care and education.

What can be learned from successful programs? What could be applied from other finance systems, such as public housing, transportation, health care and higher education? What resources could early care and education bring to new partnerships that include and transcend family, community, business, government and the profession? What are the core competencies for the profession? What hopes and dreams exist for the future? How can we go forward together?

"The new millennium holds the potential to create an integral system of governance of early care and education."

State examples

Kentucky and North Carolina offer vital stories of early care and education governance. Passed in spring 2000, the Governor's Early Childhood Initiative seeks to ensure all young children in Kentucky are healthy and safe, possess the foundation that will enable school and personal success, and live in families that are supported and strengthened within their community. In addition, an Early Childhood Development Authority oversees the initiative and administers funding; community councils assess local needs and then apply for seed grants from the Development Authority. A Business Council, comprised of business and community leaders, promotes the involvement of local businesses and local governments in early childhood efforts.

North Carolina's Smart Start is a comprehensive public/private initiative to help children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. The North Carolina Partnership for Children provides state-level leadership for the initiative, sets statewide benchmarks for young children and families, and makes grants to county or multi-county collaboratives. These collaboratives assess community early childhood needs and design comprehensive plans to improve and integrate services.

The nation and states are facing higher, wider and deeper questions that demand a governance system that is more reciprocal, responsive and resilient. Fortunately, the nation was founded on such a governance system. It is time to pursue an integral vision of governance to ensure all the nation's young children have fair and equitable access to systems of early care and education necessary for full participation in a democratic way of life.

Wiechel is executive director of Ohio Family and Children First, a partnership of government agencies and community organizations committed to improving the well-being of children and families.□

TEACHING QUALITY APPLIES TO EARLY LEARNING, TOO

by Sue Bredekamp

One of the most well-established facts in education is that the quality of the individual teacher makes a significant difference in children's learning. This is equally true for teachers of very young children (birth through age 5), as for teachers of older children, but high-quality teaching looks different in early childhood settings.

Research on teacher quality in early childhood education is limited (as it is for all levels of education), but the National Research Council of the National Academy of Science recently published an excellent review of the available research. Entitled *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers,* this document indicates that good early childhood teaching consists of three factors:

1. The ability to establish and maintain warm, positive relationships with children
2. Knowledge and appropriate use of a full range of teaching strategies
3. Knowledge of specific desired developmental and learning outcomes, ways of assessing children's progress toward achieving outcomes, and use of assessment data to adapt teaching and learning experiences for individual children.

- **Relationships:** Relationships have an important role to play in all levels of education. With young children, however, there is considerable research demonstrating that children's language, cognitive and social-emotional development skills are enhanced when their teachers are warm and nurturing. Brain research substantiates the emotional nature of learning, indicating that when children experience hostile or threatening environments, their capacity to learn is diminished.
- **Teaching strategies:** No single curriculum or approach to teaching has been found to be effective for all children all the time. Therefore, early childhood teachers must draw on a full range of teaching strategies. Unfortunately, the concept of varying teaching strategies in early childhood too often has been oversimplified as a choice between either child-initiated or teacher-directed activities.

In fact, good teaching more accurately is described as a continuum ranging from least-directive teaching behaviors — such as acknowledging and modeling — at one end of the continuum, to direct instruction at the

Continued on next page

> "[G]ood early childhood teaching consists of [relationships, teaching strategies, and assessment and adaptation]."

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other. In between are ways teachers mediate learning for children, such as supporting, "scaffolding" and co-constructing the learning with children. (Scaffolding is a teaching method in which concepts are learned sequentially and built upon one another. For instance, a child learns what a circle is, discovers circle shapes around him- or herself, learns how to draw a circle, learns that by drawing three circles on top of one another, you get a snowman, etc.)

The less directive strategies enable children to practice, perfect and apply already-acquired skills, often through teacher-planned/child-selected experiences and play. The mediating strategies such as scaffolding provide children sufficient support to work just beyond their current level of capacity toward acquiring a new skill. The more directive strategies, such as demonstrating a skill or direct instruction, are used to introduce new information or skills. All of these strategies are important and effective at various times depending on the purpose of the instruction.

- **Assessment and adaptation:** The third factor in good early childhood teaching — assessing and adapting for individual children — is critical because there is a great deal of individual variation in children's development and learning. To achieve desired learning outcomes for young children, it is necessary to know children well and to work with them individually or in small groups.

The research base on how young children learn has expanded greatly in the last few decades. There is now considerable knowledge, for example, about the kinds of experiences in language and early literacy that predict later success in reading and writing in the primary grades. Talking, playing, reading, writing, and working with letters and sounds all are gateways to literacy.

These experiences should not be identical to primary grade teaching, however. For example, in early childhood teaching, there should be many one-on-one, extended conversations with children to support language development. Reading aloud to individuals or small groups, singing, rhyming — all of these "playful" experiences enhance early literacy.

Quality teaching in early childhood education requires specialized preparation at the baccalaureate level. Early childhood teachers must thoroughly understand children's developmental needs from birth through age 5, appropriate teaching strategies and specialized ways of assessing children and using that information. Therefore, if we are serious about quality teaching, we need policies that support early childhood teachers in acquiring this very deep and complex understanding of early childhood education.

Bredekamp is director of research for the Council for Professional Recognition in Washington, D.C.□

"[I]f we are serious about quality teaching, we need policies that support early childhood teachers in acquiring this very deep and complex understanding of early childhood education."

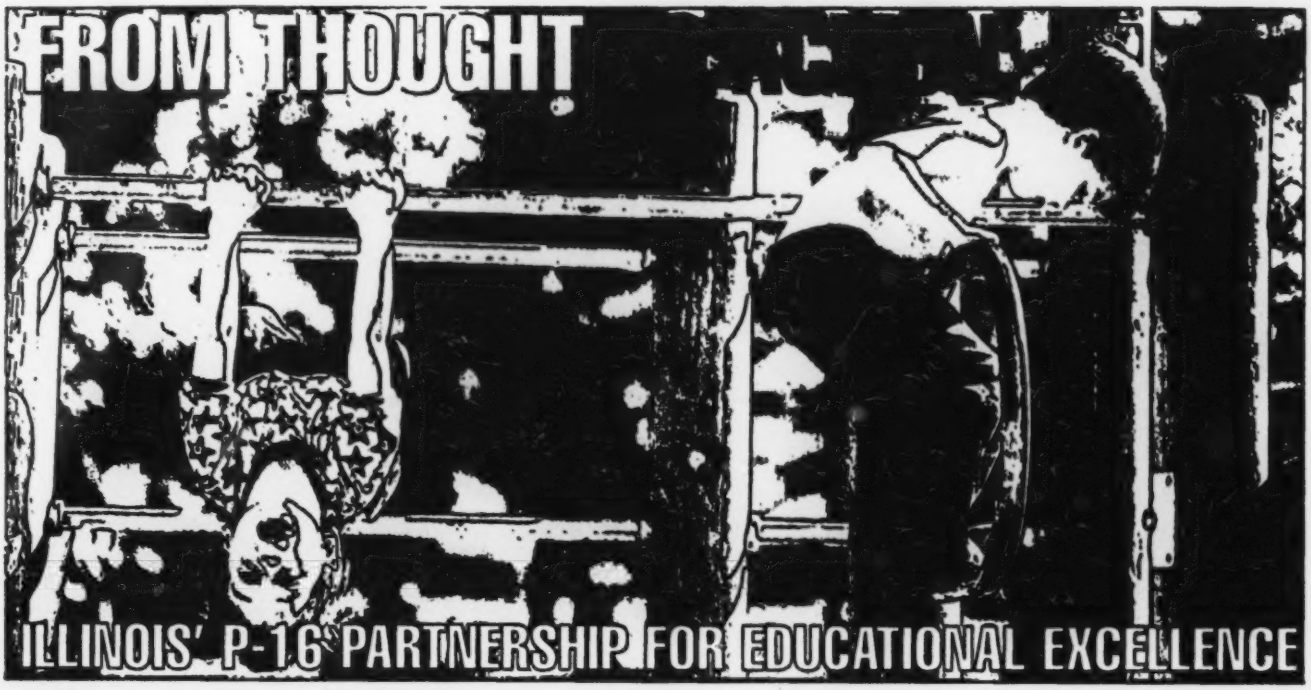
ECS WEB SITE: GREAT RESOURCE FOR EARLY LEARNING INFORMATION

Interested in information on early care and education, ranging from the latest in brain research to who's doing what to bring disparate services for children and families together? Then check out the ECS Education Issue Site on "Early Childhood."

The site includes overviews, information about what states are doing, the latest research and readings, and other good Web sites on topics such as financing early care, ensuring quality and involving families. The site is being reorganized, expanded and updated to bring you the latest information, so visit frequently.

Debuting in July 2001 will be an interactive, database on prekindergarten programs in all 50 states. You'll be able to search for and compare information on state funding, number of children served, teacher qualifications, program standards, legislation and more.

http://www.ecs.org/issues/earlychildhood



ILLINOIS' P-16 PARTNERSHIP FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

by Hazel E. Loucks

In an increasingly global society, states must remove the barriers between and among the education and workforce development systems. Coordination and collaboration must be paramount. State leaders need to strive for a truly seamless education system that promotes continual learning and opportunities for every citizen. The goal of this system must be as equally simple as it is essential: no person — regardless of age or ability — who has the desire to learn will go without the opportunity to do so. Only a seamless "P-16" system, from prekindergarten to postsecondary education, can accomplish this fundamental goal.

"Think P-16" is the catchphrase for the next generation of statewide collaborative education leadership. The movement toward a P-16 model is driven by an oft-perceived lack of coherence and alignment from preschool through college, examples of which can be found at every level of education. Many studies conclude that children who attend a quality preschool program experience higher rates of graduation and enrollment in postsecondary institutions. Yet, there is little coordinated or systemic effort to link preschool instruction to elementary school instruction, to set and support quality standards for early care and education programs, or to expand access to high-quality preschool education for ALL children.

At the elementary and middle school levels, the U.S. Department of Education's *Mathematics Equals Opportunity* reported that "students who take rigorous mathematics and science courses are much more likely to go to college than those who do not." Despite this information, however, college preparation programs often begin as late as 9th grade. Finally, at the postsecondary level, colleges and universities increasingly place recent high school graduates in remedial math, language and science courses. The trend toward remedial coursework in postsecondary education is not only expensive, but also disturbing in light of states' efforts to set standards and assessments.

Illnois responds

Under the leadership of Governor George Ryan, Illinois' response to this lack of coherence is the "P-16 Partnership for Educational Excellence" agreement. Formalized in March 1999, this agreement is the result of the State Board of Education, the Community College Board and the Board of Higher Education's commitment to improve their interrelationships under the direction of the Governor's Office. The Joint Education Committee (JEC) is the formal mechanism for identifying strategic priorities and for recommending new or revised P-16 partnership policies, goals and directions to the individual boards when individual board

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action is needed. It also serves as the forum for developing consensus among agencies when disagreements arise.

On the "P" — or preschool — side of the partnership, the JEC, working with the State Board of Education as the lead agency, developed a comprehensive birth-to-8 approach to early childhood education that includes early literacy standards, program delivery standards and model sites where both children and their parents can participate in quality education programs. The integrated, seamless education structure incorporates partners, including Head Start, private child care providers and First Lady Lura Lynn Ryan's Futures for Kids Program. The newly formed Governor's Task Force on Universal Access to Preschool will focus specifically on creating a five-year blueprint for achieving the goal of quality early childhood education opportunities for all 3-to-5-year-olds.

Illinois' early childhood education results to date have been extremely positive. According to the State Board of Education, teachers rate 95% of at-risk preK program participants as "proficient" in most or all areas of kindergarten readiness. From kindergarten through 8th grade, more than 75% of former at-risk preK students were recommended for placement in the next grade without additional support. Illinois has taken a leadership role in a national consortium of states that are aligning their prekindergarten through college programs. With assistance from the Education Trust and the National Association of System Heads, Illinois shares ideas with other leading states that will benefit Illinois students.

Accomplishments

Accomplishments across Illinois' P-16 education spectrum include the following:

- Creating Project: IMPACT, an education initiative developed to decrease dropout rates of Hispanic students and to encourage more youth to enter college
- Leading implementation of the Prairie State Achievement Exam, testing Illinois' standards, as well as providing a portable ACT score for all high school juniors
- Implementing a unified education policy plan for teaching quality, which includes the four facets of recruitment, preparation, retention and professional development of teachers
- Vigorously promoting higher teaching standards and the adoption of a more rigorous basic skill and competency test for teacher candidates
- Overseeing the implementation of the Illinois Century Network, a high-bandwidth fiber-optic information superhighway that will connect all colleges, universities, K-12 schools, public libraries, museums, state agencies and many municipalities
- Leading development of the Illinois Virtual High School, an online learning environment created to provide student access to courses throughout the state.

Much work remains to be done to accomplish Illinois' strategic priorities. Ultimately, however, every learner must have the opportunity to reach his or her full potential. States not only must "think P-16," but also "act P-16" if they are to realize the potential returns on investments in their most precious resource: people.

Loucks is the deputy governor for education and workforce in Illinois. She is a member of the ECS Steering Committee and Policy and Priorities Committee.□

For more P-16 information, see the ECS Web site: http://www.ecs.org//html/Issue.asp?issueid=76

"SCHOOL READINESS" NOT EASY TO DETERMINE

by Samuel J. Meisels and Abigail M. Jewkes

Readiness — the word itself suggests an either/or dichotomy. Children are ready or not, implying that readiness is something easily agreed upon and determined. Nothing could be further from the truth.

A survey of the 50 states found that "no state has a formal, statewide definition other than an age of eligibility requirement." In a study of parents' and kindergarten teachers' conceptions of readiness sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics, parents and teachers agreed on the importance of most of the behavioral items (e.g., communicating verbally, taking turns, curiosity). Parents, however, ranked school items (e.g., counting to 20, reciting the alphabet and using writing utensils) as more important than teachers did. Rather than a static property that defines a child, readiness really can be considered as a process that occurs over time and is not complete by the first day of kindergarten.

The current interest in readiness has been accompanied by a downward extension of the primary grades' curriculum. Topics and skills formerly taught in 1st grade are now standard in kindergarten. This is especially troubling because children have a wide variety of experiences early in their lives, resulting in a highly diverse set of skills at the outset of school. It is essential that schools, especially kindergarten classrooms, adapt their practices and curricula to the needs of the children who enroll in them, lest schools promote unequal access to education and lay the groundwork for failure.

Testing young children

Despite the lack of agreement about how to define readiness, tests often are used to decide whether a child is "ready" or not. Many problems are associated with such tests. To begin with, one must consider the appropriateness of formal testing for young children under any conditions. Testing situations may produce anxiety, especially if children do not understand what is occurring, and can simply be so confusing that some children will be unable to perform optimally. In particular, on-demand, timed tests are weak indicators of a child's overall ability because they do not account for normal developmental variations. A better solution is continuous, observational, curriculum-embedded assessments that enhances teachers' instruction while improving children's learning.

Significant changes in schooling have resulted from the national focus on academic readiness. Some states and local districts have raised the cut-off dates for kindergarten entry, but since the kindergarten population on the whole is older, it eliminates any possibility of studying the supposed "benefits" of the higher age cutoff. An informal practice similar to this has been adopted by parents — usually white and upper-income — who "redshirt" or hold their children back from beginning kindergarten even if they are age-eligible. Delaying school entry has not proved beneficial to children, and doing so poses a significant challenge to teachers since it expands the age range of the children in kindergarten classrooms.

Other "innovations" that have emerged from the increased focus on academic outcomes in kindergarten include retention and extra-year programs that are similarly race- and wealth-biased. These programs usually have an overrepresentation of low-income and minority students. Furthermore, these approaches have been shown to have negative and harmful effects on children's emotional development and later school success.

Reading readiness

Today's policymakers are urging a renewed focus on reading readiness. But if we have learned anything from the debates about readiness that began with the adoption of the first national education goal, it is this: Readiness is not an absolute concept; it means different things to different individuals in different situations. Further, readiness requires a bidirectional focus on what the child brings to school and what the school brings to the child.

Finally, as two recent reports from the National Research Council make plain, readiness cannot be defined or assessed in terms of a single area, such as reading. Like children themselves, readiness is heterogeneous, composed of language and cognition, social and emotional development, general knowledge and physical development. To improve the reading skills of our youngest students and thereby make an impact on children's success in school, all aspects of development must be attended to, because that is how children learn.

Meisels is a professor of education at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor; Jewkes is a graduate student research assistant in the School of Education.

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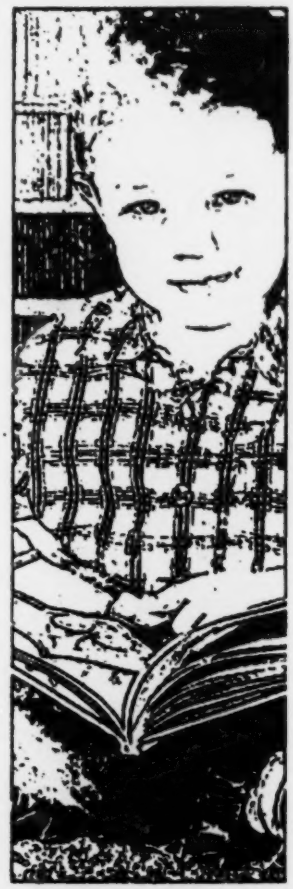

ECS' EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE

ECS' 2000-01 chairman, New Hampshire Governor Jeanne Shaheen, focused her term on early care and education. Under her leadership, ECS has been working with states to build effective partnerships essential to achieving many of the changes described in this publication. In addition, ECS' Early Learning Initiative is striving to provide solid information to help policymakers make informed policy choices and wise investment decisions on behalf of young children.

For additional information on the Early Learning Initiative — or to find out how your state can become involved — contact Kristie Kauerz, project manager for early childhood at 303-299-3662 or kkauerz@ecs.org) or log on to the Education Issues section of the ECS Web site (www.ecs.org).

ECS Publications

- ☐ ***Starting Early, Starting Now: A Policymaker's Guide to Early Care and Education and School Success*** — The culmination of Shaheen's year as ECS chairman, this report is a resource guide for education policymakers trying to reform early care and education and build a true "system" of services for children. Looks at effective approaches, a blueprint for action, strategies for making progress, and why early care and education is a critical public policy issue. EC-01-01, $9.50
- ☐ Extra copies of this issue of ***State Education Leader*** — addresses the state policy issues involved in ensuring that all children have the opportunity to learn and grow and succeed in school and life. SEI-01-2, $8.00
- ☐ Special issue of ***The Progress of Education Reform***, a bimonthly ECS publication focusing on the top education issues — looks at what research shows about early education, including: When should children start school? What impact do teacher qualifications have? Should preschool curriculum be aligned with K-12 curriculum? What impact does testing have on young children? (This publication will be released in mid-July.)
- ☐ ***Giving America's Young Children a Better Start*** by ECS Distinguished Senior Fellow Sharon Lynn Kagan — outlines a broad, long-range approach to improving early care and education, and makes recommendations for state policymakers. (Available on the ECS Web site, http://www.ecs.org/html/Document_noID.asp?chouseid=2551)

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